



## Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



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During this study of Jeremiah we have been looking at the main themes of this collection of writings and in doing so we will be dwelling longer in some chapters than others – some chapters will in fact be skipped altogether because the content of that chapter was similar to the one we have just done or simply a re-emphasis of the theme. I hope that explains why we seem to have jumped from chapter 5 into chapter 7.

But today we are looking at what becomes apparent between verses 1 of chapter 7 and verse 3 of chapter 8. During this period when Jeremiah was prophesying, a young king called Josiah came to the throne. At this time the law of the Lord, basically the first 5 books of our Old Testament, the Torah were rediscovered. This had a huge impact on Josiah and he tore down all the idols that were throughout the country but the thing is that although idol worship per say was removed from the country it was not removed from people's hearts. After Josiah had been killed in battle his son Jehoahaz reigned for three months before being deposed by the King of Egypt who put Jehoahaz's brother Jehoiakim in as king. Jehoiakim was not interested in the God of his father and since idol worship was still in the people's hearts he led them back to that idolatrous form of worship. The people knew that idolatry was wrong in the same way as we know it today but they had this crazy misplaced confidence that they would never be punished for it.

For them, they believed that God had declared his love for them and for the city of Jerusalem and so he would never do anything to harm his holy city. They were wrong. What this is this is this morning is a sermon on Jeremiah's sermon taken from chapter 7. God told Jeremiah to speak out against the false worship that the people were practicing.

### **The first thing God told Jeremiah to say was – (1) Your Worship is no good!**

Samuel Chadwick once said:

"Truth without enthusiasm, morality without emotion, ritual without soul, are things Christ unsparingly condemned. Destitute of fire, they are nothing more than a godless philosophy, an ethical system, and a superstition."

<sup>9</sup>"Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, <sup>10</sup>and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things?

<sup>11</sup>Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

These people believed all that the false prophets had been telling them and as a result they believed that they could go on living the sinful life they were living and then go to the temple and go through an act of ritualistic worship which their hearts were not in.

If you remember Jesus himself spoke hundreds of years later about the temple saying that it was a "den of robbers" in Matt 21:13.

What Jeremiah was doing was telling the people that as far as God was concerned they were trying to use the temple to cover up their sins. In Ephesians 5:1-7 Paul writes:

<sup>1</sup>Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup>and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. <sup>3</sup>But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. <sup>4</sup>Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup>For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup>Therefore do not be partners with them.

Christianity is only for those who are interested in following the person of Jesus and only Jesus. With God it has always been God and God alone. Remember the second commandment?

<sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Friends this same God has not changed – he is the same yesterday, today and forever! This same God shares his place in our hearts with no one and nothing! We come to church to worship him and not in any way to try to make ourselves feel better about our own sin, but to let him deal with our sin in a very real way.

Our Sunday worship must not be superstitious in its practice. Many unbelievers actually try to identify Jesus with the occult, or with other Religions. I remember one particular photograph I saw of a home in India where there were pictures of the Hindu god's lining the walls. There, mixed in with Krishna and Vishnu - lined up between Ganesh, an elephant-headed god, and another god with multiple arms - was a picture of Jesus Christ.

But you don't have to travel to India to see people trying to fit Jesus in with false religions. You don't have to travel to India to see people fitting Jesus into their life with all the other bits and pieces that go on in their life.

You don't have to look very far to see ourselves so often squeezing Jesus into the otherwise free or empty parts of our day or week.

Jesus should be first at the start of our day and should still be first at the end of the day with everything else in-between having to be squeezed in and around our faith. This is what it means to live in Christ. Just this week we have been powerfully reminded in our small groups about the overwhelming need there is for us to live in Christ. In John 15 Jesus tells us:

**<sup>4</sup>Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

My friends our faith does not come with an on / off switch. Jesus gave his all for us so that we could live life to the full in him and for his glory.

### **But secondly God tells Jeremiah – (2) Your Prayers are no good!**

<sup>16</sup>“So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.

Even Abraham was allowed to pray for the city of Sodom.

For The people of Judah to go so far that God told Jeremiah not even to pray for them seems a terrible indictment.

God goes on to say why he does not want Jeremiah to pray for them:

<sup>17</sup>Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? <sup>18</sup>The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger.

In other words it is the very fabric of the family that has become contaminated.

The children are being taught how to worship the Babylonian false goddess, the Queen of Heaven and not the God of heaven whom they owed all they had to. There is application in this for us. Our children are not being brought up the way we were brought up. We were not brought up the same way as our parents were. And they were not brought up in the way that their parents our grandparents were. Not necessarily a bad thing but what we must be careful of is that instead of watering down the truth of God's love for us we should be building it up in layers within our family circles. The vows we took for our children at baptism are so important because we promised with God's help to bring our children up in a Christian home and in the worship and teaching of the church so that our children may come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. I can honestly say that I firmly believe that I stand here today as a product of that covenantal promise my parents took at my baptism. I thank God for the faith of my parents who loved the Lord enough keep their promises. Yes I make mistakes and upset them - but I know that they are praying for me yet.

In the same way I pray for my children as many of you pray for your children. But what an awful state of affairs when God says, “Don't bother praying for them –it's too late, the rot has gone too deep.”

It is not too late for you and your family to seek to reverse that trend within your family. That's why we have so much going on in Hazelbank for the family from the youngest to the eldest. That's why our family night at kidz Rock+ on Wednesday that saw 110 people in our hall is so important.

### **(3) Your Sacrifice is no good.**

In verses 21 – 26 God says go on give me sacrifices if you want but that is not really what I am after,

“when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,<sup>23</sup> but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.

God does not reject whatever we sacrifice to him so long as it is offered to him from our hearts full of love and not simply out of duty.

James C. Hefley wrote an article titled, “White Man” to “God’s Man.” When Wycliffe’s translator Doug Meland and his wife moved into a village of Brazil’s Fulnio Indians, he was referred to simply as “the white man.” The term was by no means complimentary, since other white men had exploited them, burned their homes and robbed them of their lands. After Doug and his wife learned the Fulnio language and began to help the people with medicine and in other ways, they began calling Doug, “the respectable white man.” When the Melands began adapting to some of the customs of the people, the Fulnio gave Doug greater acceptance and spoke of him as “the white Indian.” One day, as Doug was washing the dirty, blood caked foot of a very badly injured Fulnio boy, Doug overheard a bystander say to another: “Whoever heard of a white man washing an Indian’s foot before?” Washing feet to the Fulnio Indians was a very caring and humble gesture. Then the Fulnio Indians started saying, “Certainly, this man is from God!” Not long after that, whenever Doug would go into an Indian home, it would be announced, “Here comes the man God sent us.”

Doug showed the necessity of showing love and support to a community while teaching the Word of God.

God’s Word says in 1 John 4:21,

“Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” 1 John 4:16b-17 “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God is in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him.”

What sacrifices are you making to show God’s love to others? Do you grasp God’s love for you and have you embraced His love by accepting Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord? If not then anything you are superstitiously offering to him is wasted and not accepted by him.

#### **(4) God finally says even my Discipline and Correction is no good.**

<sup>27</sup>“When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer. <sup>28</sup>Therefore say to them, ‘This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips.

Philip Yancey tells about an African safari he was on where he saw an old female giraffe taking care of her offspring.

Shortly after he was born, she went over and kicked the baby giraffe and it looked like she was really hurting her baby.

Then she did it again. Each time, the little giraffe would get up on his wobbly legs and try to walk. Still she continued kicking him.

Finally, he got up pretty rapidly and ran away from her kicks. Philip turned to his guide and asked, "Why does the mother giraffe do that?" The guide answered, "The only defence the giraffe has is its ability to get up quickly and to out run its predator. If it can't do that, it will soon die."

Yancey said that while it looked like it was a cruel thing, it was really the most loving thing the mother could do for her offspring.

And sometimes discipline is the same way.

Hebrews 12:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

If you were in your small group this week you will have been considering the whole notion of the vine and the branches and how God as the vine-dresser on occasion has to prune the branch in order that blessing might grow and develop.

We are not people who like to be pruned in any way but we realize that if the Lord needs to prune our lives it is for our own good and ultimately for his glory.

What about our lives?

Are we towards God the people others believe us to be?

Are we praying for our children and grandchildren that they might grow up to know and love the Lord?

Is what we offer to God by way of sacrifice an offering of love or an offering of convenience believing that... God will be happy anyway?

And as God corrects us and attempts to discipline us how do we respond?

Do we throw up our heads and exclaim that we never believed in him anyway or do we fall on our knees and humbly ask for his forgiveness and welcome the pruning done with loving hands?